197 systems of signs and ideograms which may be considered as a sort of
212 writing and the study of which is currently pursued. The system from which all the others supposedly stem, the glĩ glĩ zo, has 226 ideograms which, according to informants, summarize the knowledge of the Bambara (1). On the other hand, the Bamba use a numerical system

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1. See. p. 21. This system and two of the ideograms, of which to designates the mash of boiled cereals and by extension nourishment in general, will be the object of a comment by M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen. "Signes graphiques des Soudanais. L'Homme. /Graphic signs of the Sudanese man/." Cahiers d'ethnologie, de géographie et de linguistique, Hermann (in press).

On certain types of writing observed among the Mandé and the Vai, see J. Février, Histoire de l'écriture /The History of Writing/, pp. 528-529.

based on twenty. Moreover, an analysis of the texts collected, some of them quoted in this essay, has brought to light an /xvi/ important number of words which, according to informants, belong to an ancient language of Mandingo origin, now used as liturgical language. It is not within the framework of this essay to present this material or to comment upon it, but it is appropriate to note that the study of this vocabulary would contribute to an understanding of religious thinking among the Bambara.

173 The Bambara have a rather clear idea of their early history and even of their prehistory. They describe their ancestors with precision and know the phases of development of their technology. These premises are necessary to an understanding of their religion which, like the other institutions, is especially linked to this technological development. Moreover, the only observable remains comprise household furniture and utensils, transient but perennial material whose forms and ornamentation indicate the metaphysical principles on which their way of thinking is based.

177 It is appropriate not to neglect those influences which have acted
121 upon the Bambara through their contacts with other Sudanese tribes

113 the slow evolution of consciousness (concept of pain), judgment (concept of responsibility and guilt), will (concept of the creative effort and work), all of which develop in man with the advent of suffering
[761] and death. Death is felt to be an accident in the working out of the universal order, an accident compensated for in part by the conservation of spiritual principles and their reincarnation in accordance with the fundamental belief in the eternal resurrection of all things. The myth describes the first ritual, the rejuvenation, which ceases with the advent of death but is replaced by blood sacrifice which today is still the central practice of the rites (1).

1. Wherever possible the writer has avoided discussion of the details of myths so as not to distract the reader from the general line of the Bambara world view. But the scholar, in attempting to better understand the collective psychological processes of this people, may profitably study the numerous variant themes found among them.

The myths described below are the framework of the present-day Bambara religion and of the general cults to Pemba and Faro maintained by the people.

Preliminaries of Creation

1. The glã̃ glã̃ zo

772 The Bambara creation myths imply a philosophy of being and of the universe developed from the void, from nothing, fu (2).

[802] 2. This concept is expressed by a sign with the same name which can also be translated by "nothingness" or "zero" and is a part of the Bambara number system. See Fig. 1, No. 11. For a discussion of this sign denoting the continuity and proliferation of creation, see p. 102.

773 171 [82-1]

taught certain agricultural techniques. In both tribes, the same star, Sirius (called sigi toto by the Dogon; sigi doto by the Bambara), represents them. The androgynous Faro is comparable in all ways to the Nommo, the universal monitor, custodian of the word and of life. The yurugu and the Nommo made voyages similar to those of Pemba and Faro. In particular, at the time of their descent on earth, the yurugu, and later the Nommo, used an "ark," koro, whose counterparts are Pemba's wood pembele and Faro's ark kuru, described by certain initiates (see M. Griaule, L'Arche du monde chez les populations nigériennes. /The ark of the world among Nigerian peoples/.

For both tribes, man "the seed of the world," is the image of the cosmos. The exact role of the seed of the Acacia albida does not appear clearly in the two myths, but in both cases, it is considered to be a first aborted creation.

Faro's Reign

773 Faro, having vanquished the balanza and overcome Téliko, took over the creation himself. He reorganized the whole universe and established the order under which it still functions today. /27/ He spread his word and his light; he named and classified all things: "All things (of the universe) are under the domination of Faro; eight hundred transformations are in his power" (1).

801 802

1. Fêw be be faro ka se kono, yelemani ba kele be a la a fe.

The number 800 which is "the end of the count," here expresses the infinite. In the so-called "eastern number system," now

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used by most Sudanese, the principal units are 1, 80, 800, etc. Ten remains a secondary unit for counting from 1 to 79 and is combined with 80 for units of the other orders.

There is also the so-called "Mandé" number system, the principal units of which are 1, 60, 600, etc. in which 10 remains a secondary unit for the count from 1 to 59, and combines with 60 for units of a higher order.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the Bambara number system is vigesimal and reflects the concept of the person as identified with the 20 fingers of his hands and feet, and spiritually endowed with two souls of the opposite sex, each of which represents the number 10. If one follows this line of thought, 10 is the unit parexcellence (see p. 213, n. 2). The two counts, 60 and 80, in Sudanese metaphysics, are complementary in the sense that one, 60, is male (60 is three times the person) and the other, 80, is female (80, four times the person) (for a discussion on 3 and 4, see p. 19). In the tribes where generally only the count based on 80 is used, the count based on 60 is still used today in certain rituals (principally among the Dogon).

773 To carry through his plan, Faro undertook a voyage of reconnaissance to the ends of the world in order to name the cardinal points.

He first visited the east, and all the beings who lived there recognized his power and his wisdom. Comparing the luminous whiteness of this region to that of hair discolored by age, he gave it the name of koro, old, a word which also indicates that it was his first stop. He made the east the seat of death.

He then went to the west. As it was dark there, he named the inhabitants klebi maw, "people of the fallen sun." He made the

192 with nature; the same terms designate the parts of animals, plants, or even objects. These words serve as roots, as do the names of the four elements and of their properties. Two consequences follow:

1. A great ease in forming compound words; 2. The existence [194] of a multiplicity of homonyms which we can distinguish only by the context, but which the natives distinguish by differences in tone or in vowel length.

E. Numeration

802 In contrast to the Ouolof and Peul, who first count to five and then say "five and one," "five and two," etc., the Bambara have a different name for each number from one to ten (the word "five," doulou, [16] comes from "hand"; the word "ten", tan, from "to thank," to give both hands). After ten, they count "ten and one," "ten and two," up to 20, which is said as two tens, then three tens, four tens, etc., up to 80. The series begins again after 80 as it does in French after 100.

The Bambara have graphic signs to represent numbers. These 212 signs have been studied by S. de Ganay (1).

1. S. de Ganay, "Graphie Bambara des nombres" [Bambara Number Writing]. [Ed., Journal de la Société de Africanistes, No. 2, 1950.]

[184] The graphic system varies with regions and sometimes from one village to another, but the most widespread method uses a series of vertical lines, each line representing a unit. To indicate that the number is doubled, the lines are placed inside a circle or crossed by a horizontal bar: |||| or ⊕ or ⧺ = four. To indicate an uneven number, a line is added under the horizontal bar.

But a line may indicate not only a unit, but a group of ten, and even a "hundred," keme (whose value is 80). To keep this clear, an arc is put over the line: ⏜ = 80.

212 Some systems represent ten by ten lines or by five barred 801 lines under a single line. This method has a religious origin; it recalls that "creation is the issue of a unique principle symbolized

212 by numbers, and notably by ten, which may be obtained, among
801 other ways and if it's a question of representing the Creator, by adding the first four numbers, or by adding the number five to
[776] itself." Ten is the numerical symbol of Faro (god of water); it symbolizes what is just, true, perfect, and complete.

The symbolism of numbers is used in divination: a first
[787] group of eight signs, called the secret count, reproduces the seven first numbers which, according to a Bambara myth, were engraved in space at the instant that the Creator by his word formed the universe. They contain the whole universe.

These numerical signs were ritually traced on the most varied occasions.

Finally, we must note the existence of the sign for "nothing,"
[802] fu gundo, zero, which stands at the beginning of a series of 196 numerical signs used by those who practice arithomancy.

The word Mandé, of central significance for 44 peoples, may be interpreted, according to some, as manin (the secret name for ten), number of unity and of the cultural community.

F. Writing

212 For everyday use, the Bambara have adopted arabic characters, called by them "writing of the Blacks." In fact, only those who have studied in the Marabouts' schools know how to read or write them. No written literature, properly speaking, exists. A
538 large store of traditions, epics, tales, legends, songs, and proverbs is transmitted orally from generation to [17] generation by professional storytellers, the griot. Moreover, the whole sum of sci-
867 entific, juridical, ethical, and practical knowledge is taught orally
868 in the course of daily life or during long years of initiation. Certain old masters renowned for their learning are consulted from far distances when a chief is in doubt on a point of tradition.

212 Nevertheless, signs do exist for a secret writing that the priests, the heads of families, or blacksmiths draw on the sanctuaries, on masks, furniture, clothing, cabin walls, or in the sand.

212 For the Bambara, things exist by signs. These signs have at-
812 tached themselves to things, calling them to consciousness and to the attention of man.

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gnâma-n-kou or the na-yanka (I do not know the name of this plant), put to boil and soak in water. To make it effective, at least two kola nuts are offered to the fetish and five hens are sacrificed to it.

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764 of the staff, which lives off the altar. For the mere act of having killed a dog or a goat, of which they receive a good share of the meat, they get a fee consisting of a basket of sorghum (18 to 20 kilograms) and 1, 600 cowrie shells (about 2 francs).

Since initiates of the fetish are the only ones who can touch the corpse and lay it in its final home, they receive 8, 000 to 10, 000 cowrie shells (about 8 to 10 francs) on that score. At the end of the sangafo (3) the god's retinue go and sweep the hut of the deceased,

3. Sangafo, to go and offer condolences to the relatives of a deceased."

purify it with holy water, and drive out the last gnâma of the murdering Komo, and for this five fine hens are slaughtered. As payment for their trouble, the family also gives them five to six meters of cloth and 8 to 10 ba (4) (about 8 to 10 francs); 50 francs do not cover

• [802]

4. A ba is worth 800 cowrie shells or about 1 franc. (The Bambara count by 40 and 80, and not by 50 and 100. 40, débé; 80, kémé.)

the cost.

Fortunately, the family does not bear all the expenses. Friends [43] help a little, and everyone brings his offering: from one person they get a /228/ hen, from another a débé (40 cowrie shells) or a kémé (80 cowrie shells). Nevertheless, they bear most of the cost, and [42] the fetishes are one of the chief reasons for that bonding of children (1)